

1911–2011: One centennial, three celebrations

By Susan Wilds McArver

Editor’s note: Due to a printing error, the October supplement was not included in complementary copies of *The Lutheran*. This article is being reprinted so that all may enjoy.

With our emphasis on revisioning in the SC Synod this year, it’s interesting to note that there have been other times in our church’s history when revisioning has taken place in the midst of complications and economic hardships. We asked Dr. Susan Wilds McArver of the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C., to share her observations of where this synod stood 100 years ago. In this article, she graciously shares a synopsis with us.

As professor of church history and educational ministry and director of the Center on Religion in the South, McArver brings our story—our history—to life as she takes us back to the challenges faced by Lutherans in South Carolina in 1911.

they persevered to bequeath to us the remarkable institutions that have enriched so many lives to this day.

The Lowman Home

The Lowman Home for the Aged and Helpless (now “The Heritage at Lowman”) emerged out of one woman’s desperate need.

In 1911, Malissa Lowman was widowed and the sole support of three adult epileptic children. Her only resource was almost a thousand acres of farmland she owned in and around Chapin and White Rock.

Lowman approached the state of South Carolina, offering to donate the entire estate to them if they would use the proceeds to provide for her family’s care. The state declined, as

The original Lowman Home.



Susan Wilds McArver

The year 2011 marks the opportunity for a remarkable centennial celebration among Lutherans in South Carolina. One

In every case, failure seemed not only likely but also probable. However, in each case people of vision stepped forward at moments of doubt and anxiety to ask where God was leading the church. In the face of enormous personal cost,

hundred years ago in 1911, not one, but three significant events occurred that shaped the church’s future both here and far away:

- The founding of the Lowman Home in White Rock.
- The establishment of the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia.
- The formation of a Lutheran school in Japan.

Any one of these events alone would be worthy of celebration. But the reality that all three of them trace their origins to the same historical moment is almost astonishing.



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prevailing laws would not allow for such an arrangement.

Despondent and despairing at the state's refusal, Lowman had a chance encounter with Walton H. Greever, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Columbia, and the editor of the *Lutheran Church Visitor* (an ancestor of today's *South Carolina Lutheran*).

Greever immediately recognized the opportunity for the church both to help the Lowman family and to expand its ministry to those who needed it most. With no financial budget and almost entirely through his efforts, the synod received the gift, worked to provide life-giving care for the Lowmans and opened up the property to others in similar circumstances.

Southern Seminary

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary had been in existence since 1830, but it had struggled ever since the Civil War to survive in the aftermath. In the years following the war, it had been forced to relocate four times: to Walhalla, S.C.; Salem, Va.; Newberry College, Newberry;



1912 view of Southern Seminary in Columbia.

and Mount Pleasant, outside of Charleston.

The seminary clearly needed a permanent, central location if it was to survive.

A bid from Columbia won out over offers from Charlotte, Salisbury and Charleston, largely due to the efforts of the same individual who made the Lowman Home a reality. Walton Greever quietly but skillfully led a drive of wealthy laymen to purchase and donate the highest point of land in the city of Columbia for the seminary's new site.

In October 1911, hundreds gathered to celebrate "an achievement that makes pride

justifiable, joy irrepressible, expectations abounding," as one attendee noted. After years of wandering in the wilderness, pastors and laity alike rejoiced in this seemingly miraculous achievement.

Kyushu Gakuin

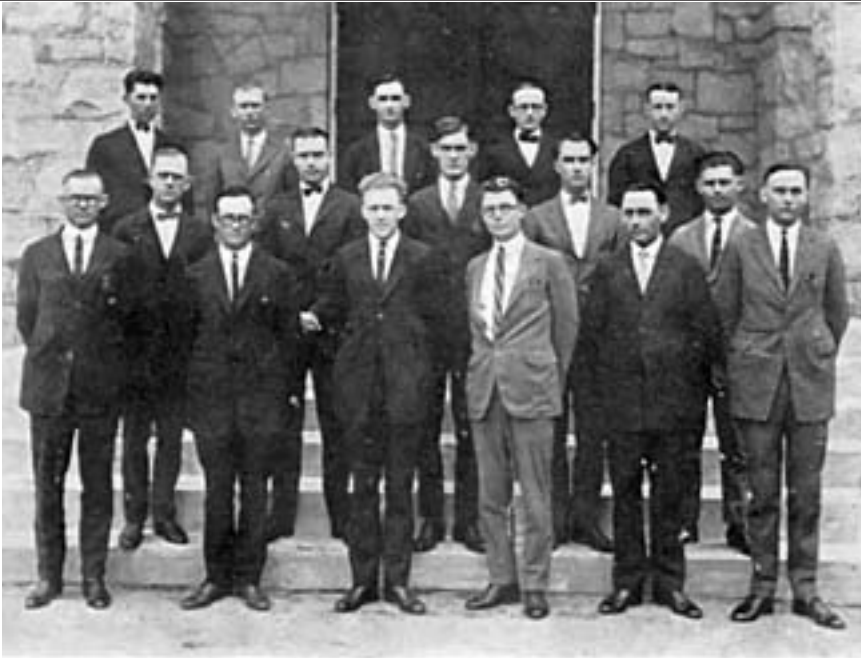
That same year, however, South Carolina Lutherans were actually building not one seminary but two. On the other side of the world, their

offerings and efforts were building the future of the Lutheran church in Japan.

In 1911, Kyushu Gakuin, a school to train young men for a native-born ministry, was born in

Kumamoto from the thank-offerings deposited in countless mite boxes by members of the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Societies, the pennies collected by children of the "Light Brigades," and the dollars raised by the Lutheran Laymen's Missionary Movement.

South Carolina Lutherans founded this church from the ground up. Women's groups (the ancestors of today's Women of the ELCA circles) read and studied about life, religion and culture in Japan. Men's groups held conventions in the Carolinas and Virginia that attracted hundreds of participants and nationally known speakers for inspiration and planning. Both men and women taught their children and youth about



1924: The “new class” at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia.

the importance of taking the gospel to “foreign lands.”

From these efforts, today’s Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church emerged.

To this day, Lutherans in Japan consider South Carolina Lutherans to be their “founding fathers and mothers.”

Individuals make the difference

None of this was easy. In fact, all three of these institutions struggled in the early years and almost failed countless times.

Many questioned whether the church should even be doing this type of “outreach” at all. Some argued, for instance, that children should take care of their aged parents themselves, rather than placing them in an “institution” such as the Lowman Home.

Others doubted the need for a full seminary education for pastors and the expense of buildings and property that went with it.

Still others argued that offerings should go to support the local church, not the “heathen” overseas.

But at each critical moment, individuals with vision and dreams of what the church could be made the difference. And their efforts, begun

100 years ago, have blessed us with the future we have today in each of these ministries.

So as we celebrate their vision in this centennial year, we might well ask ourselves:

- What vision are we being called to make reality in our own day?
- In what new directions is God calling the church right now?

One hundred years from now, in the improbable year of 2111, may our children and grandchildren thank us for the vision we now embrace, and may they have cause to celebrate our legacy as gratefully as we celebrate that of the pioneers of 1911. □

The Woman’s Home and Foreign Missionary Societies, a forerunner of today’s Women of the ELCA, was instrumental in building the future of the Lutheran church in Japan.



Who's keeping *your* memories?



Susan McArver's articles on the preceding pages highlight a brief time in the history of the South Carolina Synod. A 10th-generation South Carolina Lutheran herself, McArver has a marvelous grasp on our synod's history—the story of how we came to be who we are today.

If you wanted to research part of your congregation, would you know where to start? Do you know who is the “Keeper of the Memories” for our synod? How familiar are you with the James R. Crumley Jr. Archives?

Housed on the campus of the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C., the Crumley Archives collects and protects historical records and artifacts from Lutheran institutions of the Southeastern U.S. and the Caribbean, and even Japan.

In fact, Region 9 archivist Jeanette Bergeron said there are records from five different centuries

in the archives.

Sometimes we forget that we are a part of the ongoing story of the Lutheran church in South Carolina. We are creating the history that future generations will want to know about. In this age of electronic communications, how do we document our histories?

Bergeron can be a great resource for you in the “how to” of preserving your congregation's history. She has excellent advice to give. For instance, did you know that the Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, will microfilm your church records for free? They will keep the master microfilm in their collection, but your congregation can get a copy for a nominal fee.

Then, if you wish, you can keep that microfilm safe in the Crumley Archives' collection, which is in a controlled environment specifically

designed to protect documents and media from damaging temperatures and humidity.

Bergeron can also advise you about which of your records are considered historical, and easy ways to collect and preserve them in good condition.

Please take the time and find out more about the Crumley Archives. Treat yourself to a visit there. You'll be amazed at what you find. The framed pictures alone are worth the visit.

The James R. Crumley Jr. Archives is housed in the lower level of Lineberger Library, on the campus of Lutheran Southern Seminary, 4201 N. Main St., Columbia.

For more information, contact Bergeron at 803-461-3234 or e-mail her at JBergeron@ltss.edu. □